



The Wheat and the Weeds

Jamie Treadwell

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It's about hope

St. Paul writes a curious phrase in his letter to the Ephesians.

I pray that the **eyes of your heart** may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe.

[Ephesians 1:17-19](#)

Today we're going to work on the eyes of our hearts. It's like we have a wrapped present waiting to be delivered to a friend. We know what's inside, but for them it's hidden. We want the mystery to be discovered. We want them to open it. We can't wait for the moment of surprise and joy. This moment of eager waiting is like hope. It is, but not yet.

Hope comes from being able to 'see'. It's the feeling of expectation and desire for a certain thing to happen. What do we hope for? What is it that stirs us with expectation and desire?

Perhaps we've lost hope. It can be battered. The aim this morning is to awaken hope in each one of us. How can I be renewed, each day, to live in the strength of hope, and the peace of Christ?

The Challenge for Hope

I know it's possible. I know that faith has been alive in me. I've tasted that victory. I've seen it, experienced it at times. It's powerful, it's renewing. But it seems so easily lost. Perhaps today, you know what I'm talking about, you need to be renewed, today, in the strength and the peace of Christ.

Ever notice: It's possible to be discouraged. You think you're on the right track, things are going good. Then WHAM, it doesn't turn out the way it was supposed to.

- 1) This past week I was in the USA and met up with a lifelong friend. She was disheartened. Her marriage was not turning out as she had hoped. Very difficult without a way forward as far as she could see.
- 2) On Thursday I was stopped outside of Morrison's by a woman I know from church, she wanted to talk. She was feeling deep concern and anxiety about her health and confusion about a very difficult relationship in her life. A

woman of great faith, yet experiencing real challenges and a confusing inner turmoil.

I know that Christ is victorious. I know that he is Lord. I know that 'in all things God works for the good of those who love him who have been called according to his purpose'. (Rom 8: 28)

Yet on the big scale of things – it doesn't seem like we are winning....

- 1) Through our international connections in our community movement, of which Antioch is one community – I know Christians in Syria and Pakistan. Horrific suffering and a growing hostility and persecution.
- 2) In my work with young people I'd love to see a mass movement of young people free and fired up for God – and every time I do see these young people – here and elsewhere – I'm greatly encouraged. But then I see the influence of pop culture and the penetrating reach of the internet. And I see what's happened to a pop star like Miley Cyrus – and the kids who love her and her music– she now has well over 1.5 billion hits on Google. Yet her and her message are getting distorted to glamorize raunchy promiscuity to teenagers. Something got poisoned along the way.

And then I look on the small scale – the inside - of me
I still struggle – temptation, sin. These things were supposed to disappear several years ago! They don't, it's a battle. It's frustrating and discouraging.

I'm looking for renewal, each day, again today. How can I be renewed today, and each day?

Jesus tells a parable

Jesus is speaking to us today in the parable of the Wheat and the Weeds
(Matthew 13: 24 – 30)

²⁴ Jesus told them another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. ²⁵ But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. ²⁶ When the wheat sprouted and formed ears, then the weeds also appeared.

²⁷ 'The owner's servants came to him and said, "Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?"

²⁸ "An enemy did this," he replied.

'The servants asked him, "Do you want us to go and pull them up?"

²⁹ "No," he answered, "because while you are pulling up the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them. ³⁰ Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: first collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn."

The dynamics of Spiritual Growth

One of the disciples, Matthew, clusters a series of parables of Jesus in Chapter 13 of his Gospel. Jesus delivered these from a boat on the Galilean Sea near Capernaum.

He addressed large crowds and needed to speak from the boat so that they could hear him. Notice the sequence of parables, and the significance of their order. These first three all use the image of seeds growing into plants.

First three parables in Matthew 13:

1) Sower and the Seed - the parable of the seed falling in various types of soil and circumstances. The key message is about our role in providing 'good soil' to hear the Word of God and respond to it. Our individual response is needed for the word of God to take effect.

2) Wheat and the Weeds – As this Word falls into good soil, we notice that it's not the only thing growing there! There are opposing powers at work both internally within us, and externally in the world around us. And that's OK, it's part of God's plan. Yes, a day will come when it all will be clear. The clarity of separation will come at the final judgment.

3) Mustard Seed and Yeast – The nature of the opposition is not the issue because the seed of God's life in us carries transformational power. This tiny seed grows into something substantial. In other words – don't be intimidated by the weeds, the power of God can seem insignificant but grows with a powerful transformative dynamic.

The wheat that's planted in good soil will grow powerfully, strong, and beautiful - right in the midst of a lot of weeds. Don't be intimidated by the weeds, feed the Wheat!

How can this help us today? (quotes from Helmut Thielicke)

We can pick up, and hope for, a picture of our world in which Christianity dominates, we are the success stories, we just root out the evil and create a world of peace.

This parable of Jesus dispels any such false hope. This parable speaks of a dark menace, a mysterious power that is everywhere at work – and not only in the worst and darkest places, but also right inside of the sanctuary itself. In the best church gatherings, in happiest homes and marriages, in each of our hearts and minds.

As depressing as this can be, it may also be reassuring for us, for at least this lines up with our experience. People are not perfect, the world is swept up in confusing darkness, and living the life I really want to live in Christ doesn't just become easy as I get older. It can be a hard path at times.

We have only to look at life to see this strange ambiguity: there are no fields and gardens where only the flowers grow. Weeds are always present and asserting themselves.

Exercise to illustrate through experience:

From the front: ask the coffee drinkers to stand up.

Now, a little exercise: those around them have a job – to try to convince them to stop drinking coffee. Say whatever you think will stop them. You have 10 seconds to convince them. After that time I'll invite the coffee drinkers, who still want to enjoy their coffee, to once again stand up.

The point: What happened? What was the impact of the opposition? What did you exercise as a result of that opposition?

Notice the role of choice heightened through the opposition. The opposition does not stop you, your choice determines what you do. Your resolve becomes clear in that moment.

Extend that experience into real life, you notice that opposition heightens the awareness of choice for God, and this choice is ultimately about the choice to love – God and neighbor. We're called to be light in the darkness. Light requires courage. Even a small light in a dark room is transformative.

Two dangers to avoid

- 1) Pessimism (focus on the weeds, all that is wrong)
- 2) False Hope (wishing it would all be easy)

Pessimism – We see all that is wrong, and that dominates our awareness. This is the natural tendency in a lot of us. The evil we see in our society, the sin in the people around us, the struggles within – can seem so strong, so dominating.

Leads to nick-picking judgment of others, discouragement in face of struggle or opposition, or the desire to control, illustrated by the servants in the parable 'Do you want us to go and pull them up?' Let's get rid of the mess and the opposition!

False Hope – the flipside of the problem. I wish it were all a bed of roses. There should be no hassles in this life. I know how things should go! We get tired and weary and want to just go hide. We want everything neat and clean and successful. I want it MY way. When things don't turn out that way, we are discouraged.

But that's not life. God's about something more beautiful. Jesus came to save. We would not be able to judge everything that's going on in the Province of God. We would kill things before they had a chance to be redeemed. Jesus makes it clear we need to avoid the trap of the Pharisees, as though we carry a checklist and mark off everybody's performance: 'you passed' or 'you failed'. End of story.

There's always going to be mixed motives, some of which you won't be able to distinguish. Look out for and water the seed God has planted, even in the midst of the weeds. Our responsibility is to tend that seed of wheat so that it can grow.

The context of this parable is crucial – there is a sorting, there is a judgment. All this is set in the context of eternity. And the last judgment is full of surprises.

God is more merciful than we are, more strict than we are, and more knowing than we are. God is greater than our hearts. The one thing will remain: love, the love in which we have believed and hoped and endured, the love which never let's us forget that God can find and bring home and set at his table even the deceivers and the deceived. We look ahead to the day the Lord can say to us and to those for whom we've prayed 'Well done, good and faithful servant; enter into the joy of your master.'

Scripture constantly reminds us that wheat and weeds grow together:

1 John 5:19 'We know that we are from God, and that the whole world is in under the control of the evil one. We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true.

How can you nurture that wheat seed inside you? 2 things

1) Feed the Wheat

I've been inspired again by the words of CT Studd, a missionary to China and Africa many years ago – 'If you don't want to meet the Devil during the day, meet Jesus before dawn. If you don't want the Devil to hit you, hit him first and hit him with all your might, so that he will be too crippled to hit back.'

How can you grow a meaningful time of personal prayer at the start of each day?

What other ways can you 'feed the wheat?' Perhaps you can reach out to others and strengthen friendships. Have those conversations that build up and encourage.

Bring this idea into your preparations for Christmas. Christmas is associated as light coming into the world. Powerfully symbolic time for us, in the deepest darkness a light shines. Hope is born. We see our life story from the perspective of history. God sees our life from the perspective of eternity. Storms will come and storms will go. In the last day there's eternal joy in the presence of God the Father. These days are our chance to live out our story as we look forward to hearing the Father's words: 'Well done, good and faithful servant.'

What would help you Feed the Wheat? Prayer, go to that Bible study, small group prayer event, talk to someone, a random act of love.... You'll know what you need to do. Throughout the day keep this phrase to mind 'Feed the Wheat'.

2) Appreciate the Wheat: this is about gratitude.

Nurture gratitude towards God. Something profound happens as we give thanks in every circumstance: it gives perspective. We're not alone. God is at work right here, right now. If I recognize my life and this circumstance as a gift – I acknowledge the giver. I'm not alone. God's in this too. Therefore, there's something for me to do.

So, let's consider 'how can I be renewed, today, to live in the strength of hope, and the peace of Christ?'